

VZCZCXRO9200
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHSA #1453/01 1851217
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 031217Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4969
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
INFO RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 5764
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 9953
RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 8167

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 PRETORIA 001453

DEPT FOR OES/PCI, OES/ENV, AND AF/S
DEPT PASS EPA/OIA,

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [ETRD](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY MONTHLY BRIEFINGS, JUNE 2008

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1. (U) Summary: This is the South African Environment, Science and Technology Monthly Briefings newsletter, June 2008, Volume 3, Number 6, prepared by the U.S. Embassy Pretoria, South Africa.

Topics of the newsletter:

- GLOBE PROGRAM BRINGS 500 STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND SCIENTISTS TOGETHER IN CAPE TOWN
- SA TO DEVELOP BATTERY- POWERED CAR
- SA COMPANIES TO INCREASE SUBMISSIONS OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS DATA
- MUNICIPALITIES HOLD CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT
- SA TO PRIORITIZE BIOSAFETY
- SOLAR-POWERED CARS TO RACE IN SA
- AUSTRALIA AND SA TO DISCONTINUE COLLABORATIONS ON RADIO ASTRONOMY
- ORGANIZED CRIME RESPONSIBLE FOR RHINO POACHING
- MONDI AND WWF JOIN HANDS FOR WETLANDS CONSERVATION
- SOUTH AFRICA'S NEWEST WORLD HERITAGE SITE THREATENED
- DROUGHT FORCING KAROO FARMERS TO SELL
- FACTOID

End Summary.

GLOBE Program Brings 500 Students, Teachers and Scientist Together in Cape Town

2. (U) GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) brought together over 500 students, teachers and scientists from 51 different countries to participate in the quadrennial GLOBE Learning Expedition in Cape Town June 22-17, 2008. Students from Cameroon, Lebanon, and the U.S. gave the youth keynote speeches; Jane Goodall Institute (South Africa) Rescue Director Eugene Cussons provided the keynote speech. Guest speakers included scientists and professors from U. S. government agencies, U.S. universities and the University of Cape Town. Cape Town Consul General Helen LaLime provided welcoming remarks. Students presented research programs in four thematic areas: 1) Health and Environment; 2) Water Quality and Availability; 3) Regional Impacts of Climate Change; and 4) Earth Systems Projects. Students conducted field studies at various locations in the Cape Town region and presented cultural programs highlighting their respective countries. Embassy

EST Officer provided support.

13. (U) GLOBE is an interagency U.S. government program funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), supported by the U.S. Department of State, and implemented through a cooperative agreement between NASA and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) in Boulder, Colorado. GLOBE is a cooperative effort of schools in partnership with colleges and universities, state and local school systems, and non-government organizations. GLOBE has bilateral agreements between the United States and over 100 countries. Each country manages and supports its national and regional programs. GLOBE functions as a worldwide hands-on, primary and secondary school-based science and education program, working in partnership with NASA and the NSF Earth System Science Projects (ESSPs). GLOBE began operations on Earth Day 1994.

SA to Develop Battery-Powered Car

14. (U) South Africa is developing battery-powered passenger and utility vehicles. The first prototype is expected to be launched by the end of 2008. Department of Science and Technology (DST) Deputy Minister Derrick Hanekom announced the project during his budget vote speech in parliament. Hanekom stated that the environmentally-friendly car would mitigate the pollution from fossil fuels and reduce South Africa's economic vulnerability to oil prices. He said the project was a concerted effort between various stakeholders, including universities and the auto industry.

15. (U) DST Group Executive Officer Dr. Boni Mehlomakulu added that the six-passenger car will have a speed-determined range of between 100 km and 400 km and would be fitted with roof solar panels to enable the battery to charge either when parked in the sun or plugged into the electricity grid. The project is funded from DST's Innovation Fund. An additional R300 million (\$38.9 million) will be required to build a manufacturing plant to produce the vehicles.

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Mehlomakulu said manufacturing would commence by 2010, with the first 4,000 units targeted for the South Africa government fleet. Additional production would be determined by demand and interest shown by investors.

SA Companies to Increase Submission of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data

16. (U) Over fifty South African companies are expected to disclose information about their carbon emissions, which will be incorporated into the world's largest databank of greenhouse gases (GHG) later this year. The exercise dubbed the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) was launched in 2007, with an initial target of 40 South African companies. The CDP project includes GHG accounting for emissions, management, reduction and costs. Although 40 companies were targeted in 2007, only 15 provided quantitative data on emissions. The South African CDP project is managed by Incite Sustainability and the National Business Institute. Officials from those entities observed that many companies have started to acknowledge that their carbon footprint issue affects business. South African firms in the agriculture sector and wine production are already feeling the pressure exerted by importers and retailers, who demand to know the size the exporters' carbon footprint. Incite Sustainability's John Hanks said the CDP has received 28 companies' responses for 2008. Twenty-one companies requested extensions, while another eight confirmed their intention to respond. Targeted corporations include Sasol, BHP Billiton and Anglo-American.

Municipalities Hold Climate Change Summit

17. (U) South African municipal officials and other stakeholders met in mid-June to discuss the need to coordinate plans and strategies to combat climate change. Summit delegates adopted a declaration encouraging clearer carbon aims and strategies for municipalities. City of Johannesburg Executive Mayor Amos Masondo pointed out that local government was in the front line for implementation and services delivery, and therefore it needed to pursue mitigation and

adaptation strategies vigorously. He encouraged other cities to play active roles in mitigation against climate change. Masondo advised cities to establish partnerships with local communities, the private sector and NGOs.

¶18. (U) Masondo noted that the City of Johannesburg had already enacted climate change initiatives, including reducing coal-based energy consumption, retrofitting all municipality buildings, introducing energy efficient resources in households and planting trees. City of Johannesburg Official Prema Naidoo added that cities should make environmental management central to their planning, especially for public-initiated projects. Buffalo City Mayor Zintle Peters added that climate change required champions at the local level and that the success of the climate changes projects depended on political will and commitment.

SA to Prioritize Bio-Safety

¶19. (U) Department of Agriculture (NDOA) Biosafety Directorate Officer Chantal Arendse told attendees at the Public Understanding of Biotechnology (PUB) seminar that South Africa is making serious strides to ensure that bio-safety is a priority. The PUB was established by the Department of Science and Technology to raise awareness among the public and to ensure a balanced understanding of Qawareness among the public and to ensure a balanced understanding of the potential of biotechnology. Arendse said the government is "committed to ensure that all activities pertaining to GM0s are carried out in a responsibly and a reasonably safe way." Arendse noted that there is no clear labeling and segregation between GMO and non-GMO products, but the NDOA is developing relevant procedures. He informed that South Africa already grows GM cotton, maize and Soya. He said the South African government would begin soon to prioritize GM research in accordance with the annual increases in global GM crop planting of twelve percent in 2006 and ¶2007.

Solar-Powered Cars to Race in SA

¶10. (U) The Advanced Energy Foundation (AEF) is organizing an international solar-powered car race in SA in September 2008. Teams planning to participate in "The Solar Challenge" are already in the process of designing and building solar-powered vehicles. The vehicles are expected to have the capability to reach between 80km and 100km per hour without external assistance. AEF Head Winston Jordaan said the event would be an opportunity to showcase cutting-edge solar technology innovations from around the world. Jordaan also noted that to win the contest, racers needed advanced technological prowess combined with exceptional strategy and tactics. Participants would set out on a 4,175 km long-distance

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race around the country, starting and finishing in Pretoria at the Innovation Hub. Two entrants will represent South Africa while other participants are expected to come from Australia, Holland, and the U.S.

Australia and SA Discontinue Collaboration
in Radio Astronomy

¶11. (U) Australia and South Africa recently agreed to discontinue their collaboration in the development of a radio astronomy software program known as the Convergent Radio Astronomy Demonstrator (Conrad). Australia and South Africa had established Conrad in 2006 to develop software for the South Africa Karoo Array Telescope (MeerKat) and the Australian Square Kilometer Array Pathfinder (ASKA). The software technology requirements for the two projects had begun to diverge, seeking different software development approaches and data processing. The parties also received larger-than-expected funding, which allows them to pursue software development independently. The two parties will continue to share relevant information.

¶12. (U) Both countries are the front-runners in the bid to host the multi-billion-dollar Square Kilometer Array (SKA) radio telescope, which will be 50-times more sensitive than current telescopes.

Meerkat and ASKA are the precursors to the SKA project. The Conrad Telescope Operating System, developed by the two countries, is currently operating South Africa's MeerKat prototype dish at the Haartebeesthoek Radio Astronomy Observatory, west of Pretoria.

Organized Crime Responsible for Rhino Poaching

¶13. (U) Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) Marthinus Van Schalkwyk said in his budget speech to Parliament in June that illegal hunting for rhino and trade in rhino has increased. The Minister advised that twenty-seven rhino had been poached in the Kruger National Park over the last two years, with other incidents reported in different areas in the country. Both black and white rhino are listed as protected species and trade in rhino and their products is regulated internationally. The Minister linked escalating poaching activities to organized crime, emphasizing that this was a serious cause for concern. The Minister said prospective hunters applied for permits, but the hunts never actually occur. Van Schalkwyk said this allows permit holders to legally export illegally obtained rhino horn as trophies. He noted that the authorities were partly to blame for poor policing, and added that "without enforcement of compliance, environmental legislation was worth no more than the paper it is written on".

Mondi and WWF Join Hands for Wetlands Conservation

¶14. (U) Forest company Mondi has signed a five-year extension agreement continuing their World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) partnership for wetlands conservation in South Africa. The parties have developed the Mondi Wetlands Program (MWP) which is committed to delineating and protecting all wetlands on land owned by Mondi. They also plan to remove all commercially-planted tress. Mondi is providing R20 million (\$2.5 million) for implementation of the project. MWP Manager David Lindley noted that it was imperative to rehabilitate and manage the country's wetland more wisely. He said "failure to do so could result in the country having less pure Q"failure to do so could result in the country having less pure water, increased flooding, lower agricultural productivity and more endangered species".

¶15. (U) Mondi Natural Resources Manager Peter Gardiner stated that the industry was losing nearly 1.4 million tons of timber per year. He added that his company owned 25% of the industry and thus lost about R200 million (\$25 million). Gardiner said that over 70 percent of wetlands are located on privately owned land, and 55 percent of the country's wetlands have been impacted by poor land management.

South Africa's Newest World Heritage Site Threatened

¶16. (U) White Rivers Exploration, an Australian mining company, has applied for prospecting rights on 80 farms in the Vredefort Dome area. Most of the land in this area is privately owned. Vredefort Dome is believed to be the largest and most ancient meteorite impact site on earth. It was declared a World Heritage Site by the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in July

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¶2005. (It is South Africa's 7th World heritage Site.) Vredefort Dome Conservancy Chairman Stephen de la Harpe stated that there is no reason to allow prospecting as mining will not be allowed in a World Heritage Site. He noted that gold reserves do exist in the area, but the gold is fragmented due to the meteor impact. De la Harpe said only open cast-mining would be economically feasible, and this type of mining would destroy the biodiversity of the site. Free State Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism Conservation Coen Erasmus said prospecting would not pose a threat since only boreholes would be drilled to determine geological strata. He agreed that mining would never be allowed. Vredefort Dome faces other environmental challenges, including

pollution from sewage in the Vaal River and increasing development along its borders. Visitors also chip away at the delicate shatter cone rocks.

¶17. (U) South African government officials dismiss rumors that the site will be declared "threatened" during an upcoming UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting. The South African government has not yet confirmed the site's status as a World Heritage Site under South African law. Erasmus said that the government "hoped" to confirm the site's status by December.

Drought Forcing Karoo Farmers to Sell

¶18. (U) Four years of drought have forced many Karoo farmers to put their farms and sheep ranches up for sale. Farmers have reduced the size of their sheep flocks and have tried to sell shares in flocks to help pay feed bills. One farmer noted that he had brought his sheep from the veld and placed them in kraals for their survival. He emphasized that a birthing ewe will abandon a lamb if she has no milk. Other farmers have sent their flocks as far as Mossel bay and Beaufort West.

¶19. (U) Farmers in several meat- and wool-producing towns have moved out of the Karoo, heading for towns or other areas not affected by drought. Retail sectors have also felt the impact. Stores are laying off employees; shopkeepers report that sales are down and long-time customers are behind in payments. Nation Red Meat Producers Organization CEO Gerhard Schutte said the drought would not impact South Africa's supply of red meat as South Africa is a net importer of red meat. Western Cape Agricultural Director for Sustainable Resource Management Andre Roux said that drought-stricken farmers received government assistance last year. He added that those funds have been depleted and applications for assistance this year have not been successful. Pam Golding Properties Realtor Wayne Rubidge noted that not all news was bad for Karoo farmers. He said that a number of farms had been converted to hunting and several farms had been sold to "lifestyle buyers."

Monthly Factoid

20 (U) The Trans-frontier Park set in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in a world first. The 38,600 square kilometer park is bigger than the Yellow Stone Park in the US, and bigger than Switzerland, Belgium or Taiwan.
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